

the work of Benedict or Francis, not of Christ; there was really only one rule of life, and that was binding on all Christians equally. Religion did not consist in peculiar rites distinguishing some men from others.¹ Wycliffe affected also to regard the worldly prelates and clergy, who held secular office and secular property, as another 'sect.'² The pretensions and self-interest of the Church, and the intense party spirit actuating the authorities, gave a certain meaning to the word. A powerful and jealous organisation, dangerous to the State as well as fatal to individual freedom of religious practice, was very far from that idea of the Church which Wycliffe thought he found in the histories of the early Christian community.

His views on ordination and apostolic succession were, it is needless to say, heretical. He taught people to look to the real worth of a man, not to his position in the Church. * For crown and cloth make no priest, nor the emperor's bishop with his words, but power that Christ giveth, and thus by life are priests known. And thus,' he adds in encouragement to his followers, ' Christenmen should not cease, for the dread of the fiend and for the power of his clerks, to sue and hold Christ's law. And well I wot that Church hath been many day in growing, and some call it not Christ's Church but the Church of wicked spirits. And man may no better know antichrist's clerk than by this, that he loveth this church and hateth the Church of Christ.'³ Such violence of language, if used against the pretensions of a religious organisation in modern theological controversy, would be condemned for bitterness and extravagance. But in the mouth of the proto-martyrs of free thought, raising the standard against a persecuting organisation with the whole power of the world behind it, violence of language seems natural if not justifiable. The Church, in her anathemas, called them * sons of eternal perdition,' and sought to take their lives. It is doubtful if a perfectly calm and dispassionate temper would have afforded any man the courage to head a forlorn hope against the Mediaeval Church. Wycliffe realised what he was doing, and did it as a duty, not

¹ *Pol. Works*, passim; *S. JE. W.*, iii. 431.
» *Pol. Works*, L 242-3; *S. E. W.*, iii. 184. *Matt., 467,